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AUTHOR	Arkin, Marian; Eisenberg, Nora; Peters, Ann
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problem of how a community college writing center can maintain its personalized character as it moves toward online resources and approaches. The authors describe a writing resource developed by the Writing Center at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY) by LaGuardia and CUNY faculty and students for use by other faculty and students. The CUNY WriteSite was developed through group consultation with the goal of creating a writing place that combined activity, interactivity, and discovery. Group consultation work was widened with grant support from CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs. The group held interdisciplinary roundtables in order to elucidate commonalities, special applications in curricular areas, and common assignments across the disciplines. Five campus centers (Brooklyn, Queens, LaGuardia, Staten Island, and Borough of Manhattan) volunteered to work with the CUNY WriteSite to pilot emerging materials and develop electronic tutoring formats ranging from campus enhancement to distance tutoring. The authors stress the importance of building in access to personalized interventions in order to adhere to the LaGuardia tradition of individualized tutoring. The WriteSite is not meant to replace tutors, but rather to facilitate their function as coaches. (NB)

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Developing a Hybrid Tutoring Model in an Urban Community College

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Marian Arkin, Nora Eisenberg, Ann Peters

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DEVELOPING A HYBRID TUTORING MODEL IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Marian Arkin
LaGuardia Community College, City University of NY, USA, <mcarkin@aol.com>
Nora Eisenberg
LaGuardia Community College, City University of NY, USA, <ngeisenb@aol.com>
Ann Peters
WriteSite Developer, WriteSite General Editor, USA, <apnewyork@aol.com>

ABSTRACT
How does a community college writing center maintain its personalized character as it moves toward online resources and approaches? For three decades, LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York has maintained a robust writing center, engaging students one-on-one and small group tutorials. Serving thousands of urban commuter students, the Center has provided essential information but equally importantly supportive exchange about writing. Here we describe a web writing resource developed by LaGuardia and other CUNY faculty and students for faculty and students, discussing ways in which an interactive resource advances educational goals in a new era.

LOCAL NEEDS: THE LAGUARDIA WRITING CENTER
Marian Arkin

When the LaGuardia Writing Center first opened its doors in 1974, the students who came to us included those from groups considered "nontraditional" at college-- homemakers returning to school, veterans back from the Vietnam War and "hippies" back from years of protest against the System. But still most came to us straight from high school for full-time study; most lived at home with parents, and most worked at least part-time. To address their writing problems, we offered one-on-one and small group tutoring from nine to five. On average we served 300 a year. Our tutoring was personal. Indeed at the heart of our Writing Center was the philosophy that significant academic growth builds from significant individual growth, and that combined development can be achieved only by a positive human relationship between educators and learners. Tutors, we believed, had to use human connections to build academic connections. And our robust tutor training program stressed affective skills as much as any the academic skills.

As more and more students flocked to our Writing Center (last year we served over 3600 students), we have tried to maintain our personalized program. Long ago, we extended our hours so that tutoring takes place from nine in the morning till ten at night. But still, we don't have the place or personnel to serve all the students who come to us. And with our numbers growing much more quickly than our funding, our goal of one-on-one tutoring is rarely reached. As crowds swell our lab, we tell students to try to return during off-peak hours. But for most that's not doable. They have only one hour in which to go to the Writing Center, they tell us, because they have to get home to relieve a babysitter or start their evening job. Full-time work and school and childcare--that's the juggling act that most of our students manage. Staying on campus or returning to use the writing center or the library means dropping childcare or work or both, a clear impossibility. So like colleagues across the globe, the LaGuardia Writing Center has been turning to technology to extend its space and reach. And over the past two years we have been working closely with a new CUNY resource for CUNY faculty and students, the CUNY WriteSite.

ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY
Nora Eisenberg
Ann Peters

For the past four years, aware of the challenges in writing centers and classrooms across the university, we have been working with a group of CUNY faculty and students to develop an online writing resource for the larger university community. The CUNY WriteSite (<http://www.WriteSite.cuny.edu) started out thinking of itself as an OWL, a cross-campus pooling of materials to save time and unnecessary duplication. But quickly we realized we were up to something else. Which isn't to say we didn't greatly appreciate OWLs--the paper and space saved by their electronic handouts, the anytime/anyplace support that OWLs made possible. We were grateful to the the OWLs flourishing on the web. Purdue, Galludet, University of Wisconsin/Madison, RPI--many of us had already made use of these wonderful OWLs, and some of us were involved in digitizing writing center handouts in emerging campus resources. On existing OWLs, we decided, students, tutors, and faculty could surely find something on everything important to college writing. But was there another kind of online writing resource that wasn't out there yet? Was there another kind of support we could build? Our students rushed around from job to school to home,

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sometimes from campus to campus. We wanted to give them a solid place for writing, a table, so to speak, where writers can come as needed, pulling up chairs, rolling up sleeves, working on writing for real, not just gathering virtual information, however useful.As a writing faculty, we had a history of collaboration, and through ongoing University forums, committees, and publications, over the years we had developed common convictions about writing in individuals and communities. If we combined our forces, could we create something special that especially reflected our beliefs and advanced our goals? With the support of the University's Office of Computing and Information Services, we set out to conceptualize a resource that would serve students, tutors, and faculty across CUNY. Our founding group consisted of full-time faculty from two senior colleges and two two-year colleges, along with part-time faculty from several different campuses, a handful of graduate students, and a couple of undergraduate web developers. Our first task, we decided, was to articulate the principles we seemed to share. Quickly these became apparent: We believed in activity. People learned to write and strengthened their writing skills by doing. We believed in interactivity. People interacting with each other strengthened the learning dynamic, not least of all the dynamic of reading and writing. We believed in discovery. People learn most meaningfully and lastingly, about writing and other essentials, when they feel some ownership of the principles as opposed to subservience to imposed dictates. From this, we embarked on a second task: reflecting these principles in the site. Again, we quickly agreed that given what we valued as teachers, writers, and students, our site would be a place where activity, interactivity, and discovery drove learning about writing.

Group consultation guided development, and the principles we had agreed upon became the active standards with which we gauged our work. Student technicians reviewed every page, telling us what engaged and what fell flat, what clarified and what confused. By the end of the 1999 academic year, we had developed dynamic materials to address very pressing writing needs across the University. In our Grammar and Style Corner, our unique HotSpots yoked the often disparate issues of grammar under rubrics that reflected what we discovered as a group to be common habits of mind. Avoiding technical nomenclature, we developed "Watch Your S" "Don't Drop D," "But is it a Sentence?," and "Little Words Mean a Lot," through which students sorted out for themselves the complexities of agreement, plurality, possession, tense, sentence construction and boundaries, articles, prepositions, and idioms. Offering activities through which students can discover, articulate, study, and practice a vast but related repertoire of grammatical principles, we escaped memory and drill, replacing it with engaged acquisition.

The same principles of activity, interactivity, and discovery guided our work in resources for the kinds of writing projects prevalent in CUNY colleges. Widening our group consultation with grant support from CUNY's Office of Acadmic Affairs, we identified the intellectual tasks at the heart of college writings. Interdisciplinary roundtables helped us elucidate commonalities (analysis, comparisons, illustration, causation, etc.), the special applications in curricular areas (differing habits of analysis in natural science and literature, for example), and common assignments across the disciplines (journals, case studies, report, etc.) and their distinctions from area to area. Again, conversation allowed us to develop materials that not only inform students about the basics of common kinds of assignments, but opportunity to write.

Five campus writing centers volunteered to work with the CUNY WriteSite (Brooklyn, Queens, LaGuardia, Staten Island, and BMCC) to pilot emerging materials and develop electronic tutoring formats ranging from campus enhancement to distance tutoring.

The results have been encouraging. At Staten Island, the WriteSite provides a foundation for electronic tutoring, in both a lab and distant setting. At Queens, the WriteSite combines with a robust e-comp program, offering an interactive workout in essential writing principles that complements the learner-centered program. At the two community colleges, labs are being built, and the WriteSite will play a central role. BMCC's forceful online suite of courses will be able to draw on the site as a steady resource. And LaGuardia, of course, building on the pilot experience, will make the WriteSite an important part of its new website and online efforts.

LOCAL AND CENTRAL: LAGUARDIA AND THE WRITESITE

Marian Arkin

Last spring, LaGuardia faculty and tutors developed Writing Center curricula for five computerized labs modeled on the CUNY WriteSite. The success of this pilot determined our heavy commitment to using the WriteSite as a mainstay of our required basic writing lab computer lab program (to be up and running some time this spring). Here it will play a prime role in the weekly lab and provide online resources for students taking the new entry and exit tests that were implemented this year. As we explore other formats that support tutoring electronically, including tutoring at a distance, we will surely look to the WriteSite as

a resource that supports learning in the dynamic and personal way we value. At LaGuardia, with its strong traditions of individualized tutoring, it is important that technological advancements have built-in access to personalized interventions-otherwise they are not advancements. The CUNY WriteSite allows students to work on their own, interacting with the program, but invites tutor intervention at any point in the process, a flexible arrangement that tutors and students alike found extremely satisfying. The WriteSite doesn't replace tutors but facilitates their function as coaches, building individual skills, confidence, and a community of writers. Both on campus and at a distance, we look forward to sustaining our old values using new resources.

LAST THOUGHTS

Marian Arkin

Nora Eisenberg

Ann Peters

Electronic resources abound, but as we develop, use, and adapt them, we must ensure that they advance our goals for supporting learning. For most of our faculty and tutors technology is a central and steady part of life; but we can never take access for granted. Huge numbers of our students get online, if at all, at work or at a family member's house or a local library or community center. For community colleges especially, where incomes are lowest any time any place learning or tutoring for all is still years away, and we have had to settle today for using technology to serve more students at more times and more places. We are impatient, though, to reach the goal of universal access, when students, tutors, and faculty can engage easily in the exchange that distinguishes learning at the finest institutions. We look to continued collaboration to face our shared challenges with solutions that fulfill the commitment of LaGuardia and CUNY to quality education for all.

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Signature: M. Ackun	Printed Name/Position/Title: Marian Ackun	
Organization/Address: LaGuardia, CUNY	Telephone: 718-482-5680	FAX: 212-2521058
	E-Mail Address: mackun@nyc.rr.com	Date: 10/23/02

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